PART TWO

TAKING INITIATIVES AND THE TERRAIN OF FUTURE

CONFLICT : STATE AND CAPITAL CREATING A NEW

AFRICAN WORKING CLASS, 1946-1962

Introduction

The later 1940s was a period of social upheaval in Durban. Along with increased industrial and commercial activity came the indications of an ever more militant proletarian political power within the city. To many municipal officials, with the outbreak of the January 1949 riots, the clearly assertive character of the Mkhumbane shantytown residents and the upsurge in African militancy served as final confirmation that municipal authority over Africans in the city could only be acquired through a total restructuring of African residence. The state should assume greater control over the future of city society.

For municipal officials this involved increased control over both the process of proletarianization and the nature of African residential life in Durban.[1] Municipal officials pointed to the collapse of influx control regulations, the critical shortage of formal housing, the lack of adequate transport services and the almost total breakdown in those paltry health services available to the city's African population.[2] Representatives of industry and commerce concurred, but added their own particular issues of concern. The high rate of crime, increasing drunkenness and absenteeism, "indifferent output" and the prevalence of shantytowns which were both diseased and assisted in fostering a proletarian culture scornful of full waged employment, impeded capitalist economic growth.[3] Furthermore, employers believed that African labour had become too "political" and had thereby "lost confidence in the European." White paternalism, trusteeship over Africans in the city and control over future economic and political change seemed to be threatened.[4]

Such expressions of concern were not particular to the later 1940s and early 1950s. Both state and capital had for long expressed worry over the conditions of African labour and residence in the city. What was, however, particular to these perceptions was the belief that the issues had reached critical proportions and that their solution required a fundamental restructuring of the central aspects of both the work-place and residential lives of Durban's African workers.

The townships which were planned and built during the 1950s and early 1960s came alongside and were directly related to the massive restructuring of African employment patterns within the city. With the differentiation between permanent urban workers and migrants came changes in residential accommodation. Essentially, both the state and major employers of urban African labour desired to created a new urban African

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1.   Mayors Minutes, 1948-1949 and MNAD, H2/KM, vol 1; Manager, MNAD- Town Clerk, 31 January 1952.

2.   Broome Commission; evidence of the City Council and report of the City Medical Officer of Health, Natal Provincial Administration, report of the Commission of Enquiry appointed to investigate the Durban passenger transport undertaking, 1948 and MNAD; vol H2/CM, vol 1; Manager, MNAD "Native Housing Policy", November 1948.

3.   See for example Durban Chamber of Commerce, Annual Report, 1945-1946 and 1949-1950, Industrial Employers Association (Natal Section), Annual Report, 1946-1947 and South African Industry and Trade, vol 49, no 8 (1953).

4.   Industrial Employers Association (Natal Section), Annual Report, 1949-1950.

working class. During the late 1940s and 1950s, a new urban policy was developed in order that the already discernible patterns of differentiation within the urban African proletariat could be exploited and enhanced.

Through new influx control, labour bureau and wage determination legislation, both the state and capital attempted to segment the existing and future African labour force of the city into those having the legal privilege of being permanent urban residents and those who would only be considered migrant workers. Such legislative interventions over the role of African labour within capitalist production processes developed alongside attempts to restructure the character of African residence in the city. For both the state and capital, it was not simply a matter of either controlling or even clearing urban land areas of shacks and relocating the shackland residents. New housing forms would have to be provided in order that the social structure of African proletarian residential life in shantytowns be fundamentally altered. Discussion of the merits of particular forms of housing was directly associated with a desire to ensure the growth of social relations very different to those which were sustained in shacklands. With attempts to change the nature of African labour in the city came shack demolition and the provision of male migrant hostels and single site, single tenant nuclear family housing.

Yet it was clearly apparent to both the state and major employers of African labour that such concerns could not be divorced in any way from the broader question of economic growth and the particular characteristics of Durban's local economy. By around 1950 government representatives, city councillors and leading employers of African labour were relatively optimistic that discussions aimed at revising urban African policy could accord well with measures designed to correct certain imbalances and problems within the local economy. Some, rather optimistically, saw in the very restructuring of African urban life the key to future economic growth. Problems which characterized the production and distribution of local goods could be reduced and increased levels of profitability achieved through changing African labour requirements in ways which would see rising African real wages and Africans' thus growing role as consumer both within the city and the rural reserves situated in Durban's hopefully expanding market area.

For long it was accepted that urban African township and hostel facilities were crucial elements in the creation and maintenance of a cheap and subservient labour force in South African cities. In 1974 Rex went so far as to speculate that through the controls exercised in such residential suburbs "the revolution ... cannot follow the classic Marxist pattern of a revolution led by the urbanized African workers." Such a perspective was not uncommon amongst theorists and activists.[5] In 1969 Legassick set out the main principles behind a rurally based guerrilla, and ultimately insurrectionist, campaign and maintained that with the nature of control in cities being so high, "urban cadres, driven from political activities in the cities by severe repression" would seek refuge in the strongholds of the peasantry."[6] Yet later events and studies have raised into question not only the

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5.   J Rex, "The compound, the reserve and the urban location: the essential elements in South African labour exploitation", South African Labour Bulletin, vol 1, (1974).

6.   M Legassick, "Guerilla warfare in southern Africa" , in W Cartey and M Kilson (eds) The African Reader: Independent Africa, (London, 1970), p 391.

rigidified and successful nature of those control mechanisms, but issues which involve the very purpose behind the building of such residential areas.

The question of the motive behind municipal intervention in African housing in Durban has been most clearly and influentially set out by Swanson.[7] This work has been of central importance in an understanding of the 'official mind' of the City Council. But a too close a reliance on the significance of this approach can obscure several important issues surrounding urban African housing.

Swanson's studies deal with early urban segregation in Durban and the influence which the so-called 'Durban System' held over both later municipal and state policy. A key organizing concept in this work is what Swanson refers to as the 'sanitation syndrome'. Exploring elements of the dominant White and municipal morality, Swanson notes how attitudes towards urban African issues become couched in terms of a concern over health, sanitation and cleanliness.

Although reticent on the relationship between housing forms and residential social structure, Swanson accepts that the municipality was able to successfully exert repressive and oppressive controls within formal residential areas. Although Rex has seen in housing forms and the structures which attempt to control the pace and character of proletarianization the key to urban political quiescence, Swanson focuses merely on municipal control.

Although having less of a formalized perspective than Swanson, Maylam also views municipal concerns over health and sanitation as the primary reason for the destruction of the shantytowns. Never dealing with housing forms, Maylam accepts the central importance of controlled hostel and township environments in creating a subservient African working class.[8]

However, it is insufficient to assert that both state and capital provide formal housing and thereby destroy shantytowns merely from a concern over health and sanitation. Municipal officials had for long expressed their concern over shack development in Durban in ways which stressed the evils coming from the all so obvious worsening health conditions in the shacklands. But after a long period of indecision, state and capital only built new forms of African housing in the later 1950s and early 1960s.

That many White citizens and municipal officials explained the need to destroy shantytowns in terms of a concern for cleanliness, and a consequent castigation of Africans as dirty and unclean, does not mean that such statements must either be accepted at face value or accorded primary explanatory power. The 'sanitation syndrome' is but a partial reflection of municipal concerns and an inadequate basis for explaining motivation.

Similarly, racist statements of municipal officials do not totally explain the relocation of African townships and hostels to the city periphery. This is suggested by both Swanson and Maylam: new townships and hostels were built on the peripheries of Durban through a concern to achieve racial segregation. Yet when

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7. See for example M W Swanson, "The urban origins of separate development", Race, vol 10 (1968).

8. P Maylam, "Shackled by the contradictions: the municipal response to African urbanization in Durban, 1920-1950", African Urban Studies, vol 14 (1982).

considering ...s, questions of the removal of shantytowns and established licensed private and state owned hostel accommodation in the industrial and city centre regions of Durban cannot be considered without analysis of the changing nature of urban land usage, the capitalization of land through renting, sale and ratable value and general economic expansion.[9]

The pitfalls which result from mistaking the meaning of particular statements from municipal officials are also evident in other work. Apart from being empirically incorrect, Manson's too close a reliance on the 'sanitation syndrome' leads him to suggest that Kwa Mashu's location was due to its proximity to a municipal rubbish dump.[10] In analysing the reasons for the development of Lamontville, Torr notes how municipal policies were always couched in terms of a desire for the 'right type of native.' Such persons should be 'westernized' and thus 'detribalized' , belonging to a community living in married nuclear family units, upholding a Christian outlook and respecting the values of sobriety, the dignity of wage labour and political servitude. Torr accepts such notions at face value instead of seeing these ideas as part of the dominant and very White morality of the city. According to Torr Lamont was built for an African 'petty bourgeoisie.' Torr thus views these ideas as referring to an African 'petty bourgeoisie' instead of bourgeois expressions of the need to stabilize part of an African working class.[11]

Wilkinson has suggested that the reasons behind the massive state intervention in urban African housing development in the 1950s and 1960s are due to state and capital being concerned about three issues. These are the growth of shack settlements, general and widespread political mobilization amongst the African proletariat, and difficulties in controlling shackland society. Thus township and hostel construction was intended to provide for an increased measure of control over urban Africans and re-establish and reinforce racial segregation in South African cities. However Wilkinson believes that the reasons for the provision of particular housing had little to do with a desire to enforce certain forms of proletarian society. Housing forms came through technical discussions over various plans developed by the government.[12]

More recently, Hindson has situated the massive state intervention during the 1950s in the spheres of African urban labour and housing within the context of changing nature of capital accumulation in South African cities.[13] Pointing to a crisis over the social reproduction of an urban African labour force, Hindson views the new pass and labour bureau legislation as being specifically designed to accelerate the process of social differentiation already emerging amongst the urban African proletariat. Although Posel has cautioned,

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9.   For valuable theoretical analysis see A J Scott, The Urban Land Nexus and the State, (London, 1980).

10. A Manson, 'From Cato Manor to Kwa Mashu', Reality, March 1981.

11. L Torr, 'Lamontville- Durban's model village: the realities of township life, 1934-1960'. Journal of Natal and Zulu History, vol 10 (1987).

12. P Wilkinson, 'Providing adequate shelter, the resolution of Johannesburg's African housing crisis', in D C Hindson (ed), Working Papers in southern African Studies, vol 3 (Johannesburg, 1983).

13. D Hindson, Pass controls and the urban African proletariat, (Johannesburg, 1987).

correctly, against a too simplistic notion of a reproductive crisis and differs with Hindson over the internal coherency and meaning of National Party policy prior to the 1948 election,[14] Hindson's work is of fundamental importance.

That there were attempts to develop a broad policy which integrated discussions over the future of the African proletariat within the cities to future economic growth is clear. With regard to Durban, the basic elements of such a policy appear to have been formulated in the very late 1940s through discussions between the National Party government, the City Council and local employers of African labour. Within these discussions it is evident that, aside from the possibility that there had been considerable previous disagreement within the National Party over African urbanization, the views of the Department of Native Affairs were relatively unambiguous. Social differentiation within the urban African proletariat should be fostered with an African working class resident in the city given increased access to semi-skilled employment and improved nuclear family housing.

Despite the views of the Department of Native Affairs being rather clear, numerous contradictions over the means to both restructure African urban life and ensure capitalist economic expansion in Durban rapidly became evident. In the resultant negotiations, the lines of fissure often took the form of conflict between the central and local state, sometimes between the National and United Parties sometimes between state and capital.

In this regard however, de Villiers' belief that there were few substantial areas of disagreement between the National Party and the Johannesburg municipality over the African housing problem is somewhat simplistic.[15] Similarly, Greenberg's stressing of the importance of conflict over urban African policy arising form the differing viewpoints of White political parties is incomplete.[16] Further, it is also important to stress that, contrary to analysis offered by Maasdorp and Humphreys, during often very acrimonious negotiations between the central and local state over African housing, it was the Department of Native Affairs which compelled the municipality to develop such accommodation within the urban area.[17]

However there is not yet any adequate analysis of the structural contradictions which develop during the 1950s over the relationship between urban economic growth and state intervention in the rela spheres of African urban labour and residence.[18] Wilkinson's main arguments concern the housing quest

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14.   D Posel, 'Doing business with the Pass Laws: influx control and the interests of manufacturing and commerce in South Africa in the 1950s', paper presented to a conference on 'South Africa in the 1950s', University of Oxford, September 1987.

15.   R de Villiers, 'The state, capital and labour allocation - the Johannesburg municipality', paper presented to the History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, February 1978.

16.   S Greenberg, Legitimating the Illegitimate: State, Markets and Resistance in South Africa, (Berkeley, 1987), p.41.

17.   Maasdorp and Humphreys, From Shantytown to Township, p.7.

18.   For useful theoretical analysis see M Harloe, (ed), Captive Cities, Studies in the Political Economy of Cities and Regions, (London, 1977), M Harloe and E Lebas, (eds) Cities, Class and Capital, (London, 1981), P Saunders, Social Theory and the Urban Question, (London, 1981) and S Lowe, Urban Social Movements. The City After Castells, (London, 1986).

while Hindson focuses too exclusively only on labour. Further, although noting how various structural features were related in complex ways, when criticizing Hindson's analysis on a crisis of reproduction, Posel makes the simplistic point that "if industrialists were so concerned that urban wages were so low as critically to jeopardize their labour supply, they would surely have raised wages of their own accord."[19] Likewise, in a critique of Wilkinson which also underplays the existence of a crisis over the social reproduction of an urban proletariat, Hendler argues for a differing perspective on the origins of Soweto.[20] The motive force in the development of Soweto came from the need to advance the fortunes of an ailing building industry rather than through a desire to restructure the basis of African urban labour and residence. This is a false distinction.

The essence of negotiations between the central and local state and capital during the period was concerned with the structural characteristics in the relationship between capitalist accumulation, state intervention and African urban labour and residence. Key points of concern were the relationship between the local economy, economic regulation, the African labour market, workplace restructuring, the need for a reserve army of labour resident in the city, African wages and working class housing.

Hindson and Posel are correctly at pains to stress that state intervention in the spheres of urban African labour supply and housing facilities was never designed to entirely replace or exert an overbearing influence over market forces themselves. Yet there is never really any substantive comment on the way in which various, often internally contradictory, market forces related to, were affected by and in turn affected certain forms of state intervention. While Hindson notes that it was only during the very late 1950s and early 1960s that the new pass and labour bureau legislation was really set in place, the path from earlier policy decisions to implementation is viewed as rather linear and certainly uncomplicated.

However, a desire to restrict the reserve army of labour resident in the city was balanced against economic needs and the areas of origin of the city's African labour force. The particular nature of the local economy, the relationship between the city and the reserves and the composition of the city's African labour force decisively constrained the growth of social differentiation in ways conducive to the rapid creation of a new urban working class. The mere legislative enactment of new pass and labour bureau legislation was insufficient. Social differentiation amongst the urban African proletariat had probably not proceeded as fast as Hindson would have it.[21] Further, the successful administration of controls over African wages raised into question the ability of Africans to afford those new forms of housing desired by both the state and capital.

In a very direct way, the relationship between ensuring to the availability of particular forms of urban African labour and providing formal housing for such a working class are highly fraught with internal

19.   Posel, "Doing Business", p.5.

20.   P Hendler, "Production and Distribution of African Housing on the Witwatersrand as a Trajectory of Capital Accumulation", paper presented at History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, February 1987.

21.   Although Posel does not mention this, it is likely that this was the main reason why employers could, as she notes, prefer to utilize ever increasing numbers of migrant workers instead of employing those with permanent urban residence privileges. See Posel, "Doing business", p.22.

contradictions. Legislation over African access to the cities and waged urban labour were administered flexibly so as not to cause any economic ill-effects. Once decided upon, housing plans allow for no such similar versatility.

Although the housing question was an essential element within the new urbanization policy of both the state and capital, the issue has been under-emphasized in much current research. During the later 1950s and early 1960s, the state developed massive quantities of urban proletarian housing in a manner then unparalleled in the history of industrial capital in South Africa. How did this housing policy relate to changing influx control and labour bureau legislation? Why were shantytowns viewed as so inimical to future urban economic growth? Why did shantytown society impede the desire to accelerate a process of social differentiation amongst the urban African proletariat? What is the difference between shantytown housing and the ubiquitous 51/ township houses and hostel blocks? In what ways did the very existence of shantytowns and the nature of shantytown society produce contradictory aims and policies within the state and capital. Recent work on the nature of African shantytown society during the later 1940s and other work, such as that by Maylam and Kelly, on the contradictory position of shantytowns in an industrializing economy has a direct relevance to analysis of the political economy of South African cities during the 1950s.[22]

State intervention and capital accumulation were inter-related in potentially highly contradictory ways. Through their attempts to resolve these very difficulties, the state and capital laid the very basis for the massive social dislocation and city-wide rebellion which occurred during the destruction of Mkhumbane and resettlement of shack residents in Kwa Mashu and then later Umlazi. In applying policy which aimed both to restructure African proletarian life and come to terms with the various contradictions inherent to such a policy, the state and capital, partly through the use of direct coercion, created a new African working class that was not completely of their own making. The basic foundations of considerable future conflict between the state, capital and the residents of the townships were created during the very attempts made during the 1950s to restructure the workplace and residential lives of the city's African proletariat.

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22.   See for example, Bonner, "Popular Struggles in Benoni", Maylam, "Black Belt" and J Kelly, "Durban's Industrialization, Unskilled Labour Supplies and Proletarianization 1920-105-", unpublished seminar paper, University of Natal, Durban, 1987.